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SUBJECT: MGLE01: FORMER AOUN ADVISER WONDERS: DID AOUN  
SHIFT TO THE "SYRIAN CAMP"?

REF: 05 BEIRUT 1995

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Christopher W. Murray. Reason: Sections 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Sami Nader, Michel Aoun's former advisor -- and ex-son-in-law -- accuses "the General" of having made a deal with the Syrian regime in order to return from exile and seek the presidency. Nader sees his own efforts at cultivating better relations between Aoun's supporters and the USG wasted with Aoun's recent agreement with Hizballah. This is not the first time we have heard such accusations against Aoun, but it is remarkable to hear them from someone once so close to him. End summary.

¶2. (C) In a March 9 meeting, Sami Nader, formerly one of Michel Aoun's closest advisors, expressed certainty that Aoun has joined the "Syrian camp." Nader, who was the principal author of the 2005 parliamentary election platform of Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) (reftel), severed professional as well as family ties with "the General" shortly after he separated from Aoun's daughter last summer.

¶3. (C) Nader asserted that the Syrian regime, using President Lahoud as an intermediary, facilitated Aoun's return to Lebanon in May 2005, after over 14 years in exile. This led Aoun -- once the fiercest critic of Syrian control of Lebanon -- to progressively shift his position, adopting a more conciliatory attitude toward the Syrian regime and allying himself with pro-Syrian figures for the 2005 parliamentary elections. This change in Aoun's behavior culminated in his signing of a memorandum of understanding with Hizballah in February.

¶4. (C) Nader said that the FPM's efforts at rapprochement with the USG over the past two years have vanished into thin air with Aoun's agreement with Nasrallah. "Had I still been advising (Aoun), I would have never allowed him to make such a move," Nader said, criticizing Aoun's agreement with Hizballah. He explained the agreement as a matter of Aoun's presidential ambitions.

¶5. (C) Nader said that this agreement served Hizballah more than it did Aoun, giving Hizballah more "weight." Referring to the seven-hour meeting between MP Sa'ad Hariri and Nasrallah that took place one day before ongoing parliamentary national dialogue talks began, Nader warned that Nasrallah could broker a deal with Hariri any time, abandoning Aoun in the process.

¶6. (C) To Nader's regret, Druze leader Walid Jumblatt "stole our fight and our discourse by positioning himself as a national leader after Aoun left the scene empty for him.<sup>8</sup> Aoun should never have pulled out of the "March 14 forces," Nader argued, because Aoun is the driving force of Lebanon's independence movement. That independence movement is the natural place of the FPM, he said.

¶7. (C) Nader said he learned from sources in the Qornet Shehwan Gathering, an alliance of Christian politicians within the Hariri-led "March 14 forces," that Aoun had been very silent during the first sessions of the national dialogue talks, intervening in the discussion only when the issue of Christian representation was raised.

¶8. (C) Comment: This is certainly not the first time we have heard suspicions that Aoun sold out to the SARG and Hizballah in his single-minded pursuit of the presidency. But it is remarkable to hear this from a former close advisor -- and family member -- of Aoun. Nader's current relationship with his in-laws may well color what he thinks and says about "the General," but we assume there is more than personal bitterness behind his criticism. Even when he was in Aoun's inner circle, Nader struck us as more independent and open-minded than Aoun's other son-in-law/advisor, Gebran Bassil (whom even one of Aoun's MPs calls "his master's voice"). End comment.  
MURRAY